

# THE MOVING WRITING WORKSHOP

By

Robyn Francine Rutherford Ward

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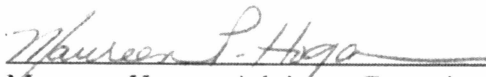
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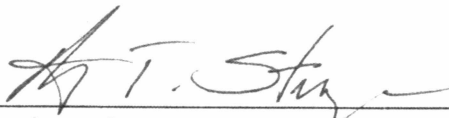
Amy Kenaston



Terri Austin




Maureen Hogan, Advisory Committee Chair

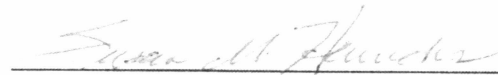


Anthony Strange, Department Chair  
School of Education Graduate Program

APPROVED:



Eric Madsen, Dean, School of Education



Susan Henrichs, Dean of the Graduate School



Date

THE MOVING WRITING WORKSHOP

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THESIS

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By

Robyn Francine Rutherford Ward, B.ED.

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## ABSTRACT

This yearlong ethnographic case study documented the implementation of a ‘moving’ writing workshop at the first year of the Barnette Magnet School. This study focused on selected students in the 5/6 grades at the magnet school. In the moving writing workshop, the students changed rooms and worked in a variety of writing rooms that coincided with the writing process. The traditional writing process steps are prewriting/brainstorming, drafting, revise and response, editing, and publishing. The classroom teachers and staff at the school assisted students in the various writing rooms.

This study looked at the benefits students gained by participating in the moving writing workshop. It addressed whether or not participation in the moving writing workshop improved the students’ quality of writing and attitude toward writing.

The writing quality and attitude of the students in the study did improve. However, after analyzing the data, with the research that was conducted, it was impossible to determine whether moving during the writing process was the factor that caused the improvements. The data did however show that the physical act of moving mostly had a positive impact on the students’ writing.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the  
human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning.

~Maya Angelou

#### Introduction

I have always loved to write; it was easy for me. I was awful at spelling and my grammar left much to be desired, but the act of putting my ideas on paper gave me sheer delight. In fact, in my elementary school years we were told not to worry about the errors, just to get our ideas down on paper. This worked perfectly for me since I loved to write. By the time I reached high school and my early years in college, I learned that having great ideas was only a portion of the battle. I painstakingly learned, mostly through all of the red marks on my papers, what was expected in a polished piece of writing.

As a teacher it does not surprise me that a strong focus has been placed on students' ability to write. Education has made a metamorphosis from the time that my parents went to school when grammatically correct English and reading of the classics was at the forefront of education. The next generation of students needed only to bubble in the correct answers. Finally, the pendulum has shifted back to a strong concentration on students' writing ability. The Terra Nova Test, CSSA - SBA (Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessment – Standards Based Assessment), and the HSQEE (High School Qualifying Exit Exam) have challenged us to reevaluate how to approach the

teaching of many subjects, writing being one of them. The looming question follows: How do we ensure that our students can perform math, reading, and writing at the required high level of expectation?

I was introduced to the concept of a writing workshop while I was student teaching. The 2nd graders that I worked with switched rooms several times a week to work on writing projects. The students went through drafting and revise and response. The teacher would edit the piece and the student would write a final copy. In the same school, I observed the students in 4th grade switching rooms during the writing process, depending on their stage of writing. The teachers staffed a drafting, editing, and publishing room. I was surprised at how orderly the students went to the appropriate rooms and got right to work.

I was introduced to the six-traits of writing – Beaverton model (Culham, 2003; Spandel, 2005) as a new 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Looking at writing from a six-traits approach gave focus to how I approached the teaching of writing. I used this method quite successfully at the middle school level. The students wrote pieces and assessed each other's work using six-trait rubrics. When I was moved by the district to teach at an elementary school I felt as though I was starting all over again. I was fairly successful at having the students write each day in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, and I very briefly introduced the six-traits of writing; however, I did not really get the writer's workshop and the six-traits meshed together.

Each year in a regular education classroom the students in the classroom have a wide-range of writing abilities. The classroom generally ranges from Special Education

(SpEd) students to students that write well beyond their grade level expectations. The Benchmark and Terra Nova national tests report the writing proficiency level and numeric score for students each year. Schools are graded on the Annual Yearly Progress, (AYP) of the students in the school. Writing is an area that is assessed.

Students also vary in their enjoyment and appreciation of writing. Students become better writers when they are exposed to good writing. They also grow as writers when they obtain direct instruction in writing and when they receive scaffolding throughout the writing process. As Calkins (1994) advises, “We need to invite students to pursue their own important projects in an environment that is ongoing and stable and then move around among them – watching, demonstrating, and giving pointers” (p. 15). Clear writing is essential for school success. Students have to be able to express their ideas creatively and concisely.

#### Statement of the problem

It was not until I accepted a position at a new magnet school that was being formed in the district that I, once again, joined in discussions about writing workshop. The school was looking at ways to accommodate the flexible student and staff start times and to provide lunch and prep breaks for the teachers. One option that was considered, and later adopted, was to have a one-hour writing workshop the last hour of the day, Monday through Thursday, that would be staffed mostly by writing teachers while the classroom teachers were taking their scheduled breaks. We started the year with three writing teachers. I was the only 5/6 grade classroom teacher that had a school start time and break that allowed me to participate in the writing workshop. The rest of the staff for

the writing workshop was made up of one special education teacher who had also been a classroom teacher and had helped out briefly with a writing workshop in another school, and a half-time certified teacher that taught during the morning exploration classes and had hosted a writing workshop in her classroom when she was a full-time teacher in previous years. Later in the school year, the final teacher was hired to help out in the writing workshop. She was a certified teacher that helped out with various jobs around the school part-time and worked one hour during the writing workshop.

The writing staff worked together and discussed a variety of methods and decided to have the students switch rooms during the writing process. I coined the name for this type of workshop as a ‘moving’ writing workshop. Since I had seen this idea used before during my student teaching, I was curious to know how changing rooms benefited the students. Much has been written about writing workshops and teaching writing through a process model (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 2003; Murray, 2004). Many teachers host a writing workshop successfully in their own classrooms. However, I was unable to find any information that discussed having students change rooms and work with different teachers during the writing process.

During the early stages of deciding to have a writing workshop, the staff that had participated in changing rooms was adamant that the approach worked well. They addressed how smoothly the students transitioned to different rooms and how well the staff at the school worked together. However, they did not address if moving improved the students’ writing nor if the students enjoyed writing more or less because of the moving.



It was at this point that I realized my potential research study. What made moving to different classrooms during a writing workshop any better than writing in a traditional one-classroom writing workshop? The stage was set and the players were in place – I needed only to raise the curtain, announce the act, and document and evaluate each scene as it progressed through the play of the writing year.

As I continued to consider the writing year, I was faced with several questions. While it is well documented that writing in a writing workshop benefits student writing, I wondered if changing rooms during the writing process improved student writing? I also wanted to find out if the students' attitude toward writing changed because of their participation in a moving writing workshop. As I gathered information and analyzed my primary questions, I was also excited to participate in the first year of the magnet school and to help structure the writing workshop. I recognized that, as a teacher-researcher, I had a wonderful opportunity to answer my questions and to observe and participate in the events that would unfold during the moving writing workshop.

In approaching my research, I considered what I thought would be the outcome of my research. I assumed that the moving writing workshop would be successful, in terms of the structure, because everyone that had participated before reported excellent results. I believed that the moving writing workshop would benefit students because they would work in writing rooms that focused on one stage of the writing process. In traditional writing workshops all of the stages of the writing process happened at the same time. In the moving writing workshop all of the students in a writing room worked on only one stage. I did not believe that having different teachers would have a significant impact on

the writing. Since the students were used to moving to different classrooms as part of the normal school day, working with different teachers would be the same as the regular school day to them. I truly did not know if moving during the writing process would improve students writing ability or enjoyment of writing. I was hopeful that the research would show that moving had an impact on student writing. To answer my questions, only time and careful observation would tell.

The yearlong ethnographic case study was designed to document the influence of the implementation of a moving writing workshop on the writing ability of selected students in the intermediate grades at the Barnette Magnet School. The research focused on selected students in 5/6 multi-grade classrooms at the magnet school. The case study addressed students' ability and attitudes toward writing at the beginning of the study and how their ability and attitude toward writing changed through participating in the moving writing workshop.

Due to the design of the school, students moved to different classrooms every hour for half of the day. I taught a core group of 5/6 grade students for three hours per day. The students that participated in the project were chosen from the three 5/6 grade classrooms in the school. The writing workshop was held for one-hour each day Monday – Thursday. The students worked in a writing room day after day until they completed the stage they were working on. When a student completed a stage in the writing process they remained in the room they were working in for that entire writing day. The next day the students moved to a new writing room to complete the next stage in the writing process. I was responsible for one room during the writing workshop. Each week the

writing teachers switched stages of the writing process. Though the teachers stayed in their same rooms, they staffed a different writing room. The teachers changed jobs so that they would have variety and so that we would each get to see all of the stages.

#### Background information on the Barnette Magnet School

The school district's website had several links describing the new school. One site answered the question: What is a magnet school?

A magnet school is a school so distinctive and appealing-so magnetic – that it will draw a diverse range of families from throughout the community eager to enroll their children. To do so, the school must offer an educational option not available in other area schools. Some of the compelling attributes that attract families to the school are: flexible start times and part-day options, hands-on opportunities, multiage learning, three hour core block of language arts and math without pull outs, and acceleration and remediation options.

Most of the staff for the newly formed magnet school transferred from other schools in the district. The teachers of the school met over the summer to work out details, mesh ideas, and make adjustments before the year started.

The design of the moving writing workshop fit in well with the philosophy of the magnet school. The philosophy and mission statement for the school states:

This innovative new school brings learning to life through explorations in the arts, technology, languages, and movement as students

engage in ‘hands-on, minds-on’ learning. The integration of the arts assures the learning experience is stimulating and well rounded, while service learning experiences develop leadership and a sense of community.

The Magnet School seeks to empower children as designers and inventors, enabling them to learn about the world through experimentation and exploration.

Because academics are very important to the Magnet School, a three hour core block of rigorous curriculum free from pullouts is provided. The magic unfolds as academics are integrated into a wide variety of explorations that will develop and motivate the whole child.

The moving writing workshop fit in well with the innovative new school. The parents, students, and staff expected things to be different than anything they had been involved in before. The moving writing workshop was an aspect of the new school that challenged the students in writing. The concept of the moving writing workshop was not well known in the district. Most parents, students, and staff had not heard of nor participated in this type of a workshop before. The students were already excited about exploring new territories and breaking with tradition. The moving writing workshop offered all of these groundbreaking qualities.

### History of the moving writing workshop

After deciding to conduct my research on the moving writing workshop at the magnet school, I was confident that I would find published information documenting other groups that had hosted moving writing workshops from which to base my research and theories. While I was able to locate a plethora of information on the writing workshop, much to my surprise, I was unable to find any research that addressed the moving writing workshop. This discovery led to my extreme curiosity to delve deeper and learn where the idea for a moving writing workshop originated. With each person that I interviewed, I continued to trace the moving writing workshop backwards until I arrived at a local group of teachers in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Around 1990, several teachers attended a summer institute at the University of Alaska – Fairbanks that dealt with the Bay Area Writing Project method of writing. That fall the teachers attempted to use the writing method in their classrooms. The teachers became frustrated with all the different stages of the writing process taking place at the same time in their classroom. The teachers decided to set up a “three-room exchange.” One room was brainstorming and drafting, another was response to writing, and the final room was editing. As time went on, many other classroom teachers as well as the librarian, special education teacher, music teacher, and principal participated during the writing workshop time.

The writing process that the teachers decided to use had seven basic steps, including: brainstorming, first draft, response, second draft, works processing, editing, and final draft. Each week the teachers’ changed jobs in the writing process. The rooms

remained the same with signs on the doors so that the students would not get confused; the teachers moved rooms. Each teacher was responsible for teaching writing lessons to their own class of students. The lessons were based on the grammatical standards and rules of writing that all students need to learn. They also developed mini lessons from situations that they saw in the students' writing as they edited their work and things they noticed in projects that were completed. The teachers worked together and used the district requirements to create a list of the kinds of writing they were required to teach during the year. Some of the types of writing were narrative, descriptive, compare and contrast, and their own original stories. The teachers were also responsible for evaluating their own students' work.

The teachers were satisfied that the writing program was very successful. They were happy that they had developed a method that allowed them to host a writing workshop without the frustration of having to contend with all of the writing stages in one room at the same time. The teachers presented workshops to share their ideas and materials around the district. Many teachers in the district have used their ideas and adapted them to their own classroom and school situations.

Writing workshops are a well-documented approach for teaching writing. Many researchers have recorded techniques that are incorporated into writing rooms around the country. Having students change rooms while participating in a writing workshop is a phenomenon worthy of research and documentation.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is an illusion that writers live more significant lives than non-writers;  
the truth is, writers are just more in the habit of finding the significance  
that is there in their lives. ~ Vicki Venton

#### Introduction

In the school day there are many things that students need to learn. Writing is one important event that occurs across the curriculum. Learning to write well and appreciate writing is an important task. There has been a great deal of research surrounding writing and the teaching of writing. In this literature review, I will showcase many facets of what is known about writing, primarily through a writing workshop approach. I will also provide evidence of the benefits of movement during the school day. This literature review will also touch on the subject of incorporating movement into the writing workshop – a paradigm shift in writing instruction that lacks research.

#### Writing workshop

One approach to teaching writing in schools that is well documented is the writing workshop. It is a subject area that is integrated into the entire school day, but can also stand-alone in a writing workshop. For more than twenty years, writing workshop has been an effective structure for supporting developing student writers. During this block of time, students write on assigned and chosen topics. Routman (2005) suggests that we, “Think of writing workshop as the time in which everything that writers do to create a meaningful piece of writing for a reader takes place” (p. 174). Ray (2001) sees the writing workshop as, “... a place and time for projects, a place and time when they can

make ‘writing kinds of things’ and spend time being what a writer is and doing what a writer does” (p. 61). The writing workshop is a venue for students to freely create writing pieces and receive feedback to fine-tune their piece.

A writer’s workshop is equal to other settings where artisans and craftsmen process pieces to create a finished product. Often the artist will start one piece only to later abandon the piece to work on another. At other times the artist will have a piece that looks complete to an outsider, but will make subtle or often major changes to perfect the piece to his or her satisfaction. Then, and only then, is the piece complete. During the writer’s workshop, students develop a piece of writing by revising and editing sometimes several times until the piece is written to the writer’s satisfaction. During the writing process students can confer with other students and receive feedback and suggestions for perfecting a piece. Fountas & Pinnell (2001) state that, “The purpose of the writing workshop is to give students opportunities to write within the school day and to provide appropriate, intensive, targeted instruction to the whole group, small group, and individuals” (p. 50).

While students work in the writing workshop setting and learn the writing process, they have to learn how to thoughtfully read and reread their drafts. Murray (2004) states that, “The workshop’s primary justification may be that students see writing in process – writing still seeking its meaning – and learn to read it more effectively” (p. 150). Editing and revising a piece are very crucial keys to good writing. The beauty of the writing workshop is the potential for change that occurs with each writing piece. Murray (2004) points out that, “When a writer reads the writer’s own text there is the



constant possibility of change” (p. 150). In the writing process, change is good. The quality of the students’ writing improves each time change is considered and with each new draft. In writing, the students’ reach their own age of enlightenment and awareness that affects the way the next piece is presented.

It is easy to structure writing where students receive a topic and quietly work alone on their assigned project for a set number of days until its completion. A few days later the next assignment is explained. Teaching students to write is much more than that and the writing workshop is an exciting venue to accomplish this task. In the writing workshop, students direct their own work in the time we devote to the writing workshop. Ray (2001) suggests that, “... in order to teach well in January and March and May, we must meet this challenge head-on in September and October and November – however long it takes to teach children to engage independently as writers” (p. 59-60).

The writing workshop setting provides a safe place for students to experiment and experience writing. It is important to note and to assure students that everything they write will not be a great piece of writing. Ray (2001) reminds us that, “With the focus on writers in the writing workshop, teachers realize that it’s okay if every piece a student writes is not a masterpiece; it’s okay if students write a lot of not-so-good stuff alongside the really good stuff” (p.10).

While the students have the freedom to grow in the writing workshop, teachers also make changes that encourage growth in students. Establishing a writing workshop is a transformation of teaching writing as usual. It is a deliberate move to allow students more freedom in a structured and organized environment. As a middle school writing

teacher, Nancy Atwell, dared to change the structure of her classroom to a writing workshop format. The students had the freedom to choose and develop their own ideas for writing and work with the other students in the classroom to develop their pieces. Atwell (1998) shared her joy regarding her students' progress.

I saw them take chances, trying new subjects, styles, and formats.

I saw them take responsibility, sometimes judging a single draft sufficient and other times deciding the sixth draft represented their best meaning. I saw them take care, editing and proofreading so that real readers would attend to their meanings, not their mistakes.

I saw them take time, writing and planning their writing outside of school as well as in. I watched as my English classes became a writing workshop. Suddenly, the pieces fit. (p. 15)

In a writing workshop setting, students learn to work with their peers and teacher to draft, edit, revise, and produce a polished piece of writing. Lensmire (1994) shares his ideas about the writing workshop. He states, "Workshop approaches encourage teachers and children to think of children as teachers of writing in the classroom. One of the responsibilities of workshop teachers, then, is to ensure that children respect and help each other in their interactions with peers" (p. 15).

Key components are necessary to develop meaningful pieces of writing. Students need a simple structure, time to write, the freedom to choose their topics, and strategies to adjust their writing - a writing process. Students also benefit from conferencing during writing, by having knowledge of the six-traits of writing, and they

need to know where to acquire the needed writing materials (Fiderer, 1993; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Routman, 2005). When students understand these parameters, they can successfully proceed in a writing workshop. These are the categories that I will use lay a foundation and to further provide documentation of the information available regarding writing and the teaching of writing in the writing workshop environment. This literature review will also provide evidence of ways to help students improve as writers during a writing workshop and show how students' attitude toward writing can change through participation in a traditional writing workshop.

#### Simple structure

When students create in a workshop environment, they need to know what is expected of them and the parameters that they will work in to accomplish the tasks. By setting guidelines early and providing the students with a simple structure or format, the students quickly learn the expected routine for the writing time. A simple structure is developed around the high expectations that the teacher sets for the writing workshop. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) state that the workshop provides “conditions that allow students to occupy the zone where they can work/play with language, and learn as they do it” (p. 3). Individuals that have never participated in a writing workshop often think of the writing workshop as an easy, unstructured writing time. However, this is a myth. When students learn in a writing workshop setting, they understand that there are high expectations for completing quality work and working cooperatively in a respectful, helpful manner. According to Fletcher & Portalupi (2001), “Workshop is a rigorous learning environment that has its roots in the traditional system in which apprentices

learned the skills of their trade by working at the sides of master craftsmen and women” (p. 2). Students learn how the room will be used, how the time will be balanced between instruction time, writing, and sharing, and how pieces will be published during the workshop time. Fiderer (1993) created charts with her students to serve as reminders to help them work independently. The charts provided students with help on how to find a topic, what to do when they are stuck, conferencing, and help with revising and editing. Students work best when they understand what is expected of them. They need to know the guidelines and the structure that they will follow on a daily basis. As students learn the routine of the writing program, they begin to work on-tasks independently. Ray (2001) points out that, “For the writing workshop to be successful, it must be highly structured and must work the same way basically every day so that it could almost run itself independent of directed activity” (p. 14). When we dare to schedule specific time for writing, we will begin to see the value and student enjoyment in the writing workshop. Lucy Calkins (1983) conducted a writing research project and documented changes that took place at an elementary school. She wrote, “Soon, not only the schedule for writing but also the agenda within each writing workshop, was predictable. Writing always began with a ten-minute mini-lesson, followed by a fifty-minute workshop for writing and conferencing, followed by some method of sharing work-in-process” (p. 31).

Within the simple writing structure students also have choice. The choices they have, however, cannot override the firm guidelines that are set by the teacher. Graves (2003) notes that, “Although the children had much responsibility in choice of topic and

in discovering their subject and information, a high degree of structure prevailed in the room” (p. 17). Students need to know how to receive help when the teacher is not available, how long they will write, where to put the piece of writing they are working on at the end of the workshop, and during sharing time the expectations for listening and responding to the person sharing (Calkins, 1994; Fiderer, 1993; Graves, 2003; Ray, 2001). When set guidelines are in place students will feel comfortable to freely share their topics.

Though it seems obvious and unnecessary to mention, students need to know where to acquire the needed materials during the writing time. When this is established as part of the daily routine, the students can flow through the writing time independently. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) point out that, “Writers, like all craftspeople, need access to their tools” (p. 16). A set structure allows the students to go about their tasks of writing independent of the teacher directing them daily every step of the way. The students know their responsibilities and the teacher’s expectations of how events will transpire during the writing time.

### Writing time

An important aspect of the writer’s workshop is that students have a predictable time to write. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) point out that it is imperative for students to have frequent, predictable time to write. When students know that they will write on a regular basis and at a set time they adjust their thinking and prepare for the event. When students know they have a specific time to return to a piece of writing, they think about the piece when they are away from it and plan what they will do next. Knowing that they

have that time to continue to work on a specific piece of writing alleviates the stress that students feel when they have to complete a piece in one setting. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001). Writing workshop should be as reliable as lunchtime is in schools. Students need to know without any uncertainty that writing will occur at the prearranged time and scheduled days, just like lunch happens daily at a set time. Schedules in the school day change, however, the writing time needs to stay consistent. Ray (2001) addresses this issue by stating that, "Writing workshops break down when they lose this quality, when they become questionable, when there's a chance the teacher may decide 'we're not having it today'" (p.52). In order for students to truly get into the rhythm of writing, it is better for writing to take place in big chunks of time instead of a four-hour block of time once a week. It would ideally take place a minimum of three times per week. Students need to have the day-to-day flow of writing to help cultivate the writing habit. Fiderer (1993) states, "Because I let my students know the days and times they will be writing, they realize that they are expected to write when workshop time arrives" (p. 9). When students are given a substantial amount of predictable writing time, they will settle into a routine and begin to produce quality work.

Once students are accustomed to the set writing times, it is important to help the students determine what they will write. At times during the writing workshop, the teacher provides a writing topic for the students. However, during the writing workshop, it is also vital that the students learn how to choose their own topics for writing. This is another, well-documented topic that is a component of the writing workshop.

### Choosing a topic

Choosing a topic to write about is generally very hard for intermediate grade students. For most of their lives teachers have provided them with story starters and writing topics (Graves, 2003). It is essential that students learn to choose their own topic. Graves states, "Writers who do not learn to choose topics wisely lose out on the strong link between voice and subject. A child writes about a topic because he thinks he knows something about it" (p. 21). When students choose their own topics they are encouraged to look inside themselves for material to write about, as well as notice their surroundings. Graves further states that, "Writers who learn to choose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills at the point of best topic. With best topic the child exercises strongest control, establishes ownership, and with ownership, pride in the piece" (p.21).

There are some students that do not have any trouble finding topics to write about. The goal for these students is to help them decide which topics to write about and how to develop the piece. Students that do not realize their topics automatically need guidance to choose topics. They need strategies for realizing the topics that lie within themselves and outside influences to jog their memories. It is important for the teacher to scaffold students to realize the world around them and the topics that it provides. Scaffolding, like the structure on the side of a building project, provides support for students that need help with their writing. Gibbons (2002) states that,

Scaffolding, however, is not simply another word for help. It is  
a special kind of help that assists learners to move toward new

skills, concepts, or levels of understanding. Scaffolding is thus the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone. It is future-oriented: as Vygotsky has said, what a child can do with support today, she or he can do alone tomorrow (p. 10).

This can be accomplished through introducing students to good literature, students sharing their drafts with others, teachers modeling their own pieces of writing and topic selection, and brainstorming possible topics with students. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) suggest, “Can you imagine aspiring to be a great chef without having tasted wonderful food? Can you envision becoming an accomplished painter without studying the creative efforts of other painters? How can children improve as writers without ample time spent reading?” (p. 74). Teachers need to share good examples of literature aloud with students. Students also need opportunities to read independently. Reading helps fuel students’ with topics and ideas for writing. Once a student’s interest is peaked, creative writing can flow. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) address this topic by stating, “Regardless of where students are on the road toward reading independently, the time they spend reading books of their choice will fuel their writing. Through independent reading, students discover a genre or author they love” (p. 78). Often students will emulate the author’s style in their own writing. Eventually students discover their own style of writing. Literature is valuable for demonstrating the possibilities available to writers.



Free writing is a technique that is often used to get students writing. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) explain, “Fast writing, or free writing, is a never-fail technique to get anyone to write. It works particularly well after a visualizing experience” (p. 27). One technique for free writing includes letting the students know how long they will write, writing whatever comes to mind without worrying about conventions, writing without stopping, writing the last word they wrote over and over until new ideas come to mind, and finally, when the time is up, to underline parts of the writing that speaks to them. Lane (1993) presents another view of free writing. He suggests, “Freewriting can be one of the most useful tools for gaining fluency as a writer, but it doesn’t help all writers” (p. 134). Lane (1993) goes on to say that teachers have been encouraged to teach freewriting as an avenue for good writing. The teachers have checklists in the classroom and they making sure that all of the students web-chart, freewrite, and brainstorm for every story they write. Unfortunately, they do this even though the techniques might be totally incongruous with a student’s individual writing and revising style. While free writing can help students get words on paper, it may not help all students choose a topic for a piece they want to write to completion. It is important for students to rely on other writing skills to help them choose a topic when free writing does not work.

Students write for many different reasons in school. Students need to be adept at choosing topics for many writing situations. When students write research reports or other forms of writing to learn they use the knowledge that they have learned in writing workshop to complete the tasks. Atwell (1990) suggests that, “Writing in the content area does not have to be a test of reading, a performance for the teacher that demonstrates

whether the student located and reassembled someone else's information" (p. xii).

Writing in the content area can be an enjoyable journey of discovery. When students receive guidelines and instructions, but are also given choice, they enjoy writing to learn. Atwell (1990) shares what she noticed when her students were allowed to choose research topics. She states, "...students selected their own topics, and their study evolved naturally from our science curriculum. When they went to the library, they didn't rush to the encyclopedias. They looked for resources on the shelves and used the card catalogue subject drawers" (p. 3). Writing in the content area and writing from learning appeals to many intermediate grade writers. When a student is interested in the subject that they are writing about, they put more effort into the assignment. Writing to learn is just one more form of writing or genre that can be introduced in the writing workshop and across the curriculum. Regardless of the writing format, it is important to conference or meet with students and monitor their progress. Conferencing allows the teacher to ensure that the students are staying close to a reasonable plumb line in their writing.

### Conferencing

The writing conference can arguably be the most important event that takes place in a writing workshop. Calkins, Harman, & White (2005) noticed that in, "...classrooms of some teachers, children grow in leaps and bounds, while in the classrooms of other teachers, children make only modest grains. I am utterly convinced that the difference has everything to do with the two teachers' abilities to confer" (p. 4). Writing conferences provide wonderful opportunities for individualized composition and grammar instruction. A conference is a meeting where students discuss a piece of

writing. Conferencing with students is best accomplished when the student is first to comment on the draft, present questions and areas where they need assistance. Ray (2001) suggests that, “Conferences are ‘the essential act’ in workshop teaching because of their individualized nature” (p. 156).

There are many purposes for a conference. The ultimate goal is to move students to become better writers. Routman (2005) states that, “A writing conference is a meeting to discuss student work. Conferences can have a number of different purposes – to celebrate, validate, encourage, nudge, teach, assess, set goals – and they can take different forms” (p. 206).

Teachers often start the writing workshop with a mini lesson and then flow into a time when they write for about five minutes while the students write. At this point the teacher moves among the students conferring with individuals. Calkins (1994) suggests, “Conferring is at the heart of the writing workshop. It’s difficult to learn to confer well, and it’s difficult to learn to manage the workshop so that frequent, effective conferring is possible, but it’s worth the struggle” (p. 223-224). Having a well organized, structured writing workshop where students know their jobs is the key to having a successful writing workshop and time to confer with students. Many teachers shy away from holding conferences during the writing workshop. They believe that conferences are too time consuming to fit into the busy, structured writing time. Routman (2005) states that, “Writing conferences do not need to be long, hard, and tedious. In fact, conducting a conference is enjoyable and efficient once we and our students are clear about our writing purposes, engaged in the process, and know what is expected” (p.220). When

conferences are individual, students receive assistance at their exact level and areas of need. When students take risk and write using different genres, conferences allows an avenue for support. Ray (2001) believes that since we invite students to explore different kinds of things with writing, and because the students are at different places in their experiences as writers, they need different kinds of teaching to support their work.

When conferring with students it is easy to take over the piece of writing and quickly mark suggested changes. It is important to remember that the piece belongs to the student. It is necessary to guard against teaching students to be dependent on suggested corrections to complete a piece of writing. Calkins (1994) suggests that one of the most important rules to keep in mind is that, “We are teaching the writer and not the writing” (p.228). By looking at how to help a writer improve their skills, the writer and the writing piece will automatically improve. Calkins (1994) further argues that, “If the piece of writing gets better but the writer has learned nothing that will help him or her another day on another piece, then the conference was a waste of everyone’s time” (p.228).

During conferencing it is important to keep anecdotal records. The records help the teacher know what students they have met with and when. It also helps the teacher when they confer again with the student to refer back to his or her notes on the topics they have discussed. The teacher can inquire how a particular subject has progressed. Note keeping helps with accountability for the student and the teacher (Graves, 2003; Ray, 2001).

A conference can occur any time during the process of completing a writing piece. As a student progresses through the writing process, he or she may require several conferences or assistance to guide them to the next step in the writing process.

### The Writing Process

Traditional writing workshops teach students steps they follow as they process a piece of writing. Prewriting/brainstorming, rough draft, revise and response, editing, and publishing are the basic process categories (Fiderer, 1993; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). It is important, however, to recognize the uniqueness of individual students, and allow them to find the process that is right for them. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) state, “But the best way to get exemplary writing from our students is by helping each of them find an effective writing process” (p. 61). The writing process is not a rule that is sealed in stone; it is a format that writers naturally follow, in some form or another, as they write. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) further assert that the writing process is not a ‘program.’ The writing process reflects the cycle writers go through as they write. When students understand the writing process, they have a foundation to proceed during the writing workshop. The student spends time considering what they will write and how they will present the information. The exploration stage in the writing process can entail observing events, people, and objects around you, analyzing your personal experiences, free writing and sketching your thoughts, researching through reading and listening, reflecting, and becoming aware of your interest. According to Fountas & Pinnell (2001) “Exploration is vital to developing purpose, finding and focusing a topic, deciding the

genre (or form) to use, calling up models of language from life experiences and reading – just about everything related to creating a written text” (p. 52).

It is important to introduce and model the various stages of the writing process to beginning writers and writers that are new to the writing workshop so that they are aware of what writers do when they write. When students are aware of possible steps to take in the writing process, they know how to resolve a problem in their own writing when one arises. Murray (2004) states that when students are constructive readers for others, “They will learn how to be constructive readers of their own drafts. They will also learn effective variations in the writing process by seeing fellow writers struggle to make meaning with the symbols of language” (p. 188). Practice and struggle in the writing process is good for student growth. The more students practice, the better they become at determining a process that works best in their writing. Graves (2003) writes that teachers need to know the writing process from inside and the outside in order to answer children’s questions. “They know the writing process from the inside because they work at their own writing; they know it from the outside because they are acquainted with research that shows what happens when people write” (p. 220). Teachers model writing with their students by actually writing on their own piece of paper also, while the students write, by drafting where students can see them writing – on a large piece of paper or on an overhead, by drafting on a shared piece with the students, and also in mini-lessons (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 2003).

The goal of teaching a writing process is that students learn to look inside themselves and at the world around them and let the ideas flow onto the pages they

produce. Calkins (1994) shares, “My hope is that in our writing workshop all of us – teachers and children alike – will be able to take the small threads and small stones of experience and of thought, declare them significant, and make something of them” (p. 21).

While teaching the writing process it is equally important to concentrate on writing instruction. Writing instruction occurs during conferencing and throughout the writing process. It is important to take advantage of opportunities that arise and to create situations to teach writing during the writing workshop.

### Teaching Writing

Teaching writing in the writing workshop is not as much about planning lessons to teach weeks or months in advance as it is about planning lessons and presenting them as the individuals and groups of students in the classroom show they have a need for the lessons. Teaching writing is about starting with a basic structure and guidelines and then allowing the students to create their own style within the given framework. Writing teachers teach students how to find and appreciate the knowledge that lies inside them. Students learn how to teach what they know, and they know a lot – most students do not enter school knowing that fact.

It is up to the teacher to scaffold students into the fine art of delivering their message, presenting their canvas, allowing others to peruse their scrolls. A writing teacher shares their love of writing in the hope that the students will in turn unveil, some for the first time, a layer of appreciation that never had a chance to develop – a love of

the craft of exposing ones heart, mind, and soul. When discussing teaching in writing workshop setting, Calkins (1994) states,

Our teaching changes when we turn our classroom into writing workshops. Instead of planning each day's new activities and assignments, we need to anticipate how we will initiate, scaffold, and guide the classroom community toward an ever-deepening involvement, and we need to select rituals, arrangements, and classroom structures. This is no small challenge. (p. 183)

One of the hardest things for a struggling reader and writer, or any reader and writer for that matter, to do is to edit their own drafts. In order to teach writing we have to teach reading. Murray (2004) reminds us that, "The writer's first reader is always the writer" (pg. 149). It is essential that the teacher allow the student to take the lead when assisting the student with their writing piece. The student is the only one that knows all of the changes that have taken place in the piece and the things that they left out in the current draft. When conferencing with a student it is important to have the student read the draft to the teacher. Murray (2004) further shares that, "If the teacher does the reading for the student, the student is cheated of the opportunity to learn. The teacher should listen to the student – as a fellow writer... teaching the student in each conference how to read with increasing skill" (p. 150). After the student reads the piece the teacher can respond and help guide the student in making changes. Murray (2004) shares his knowledge of how students interact with their writing. He states that,

"The writer reads and rereads and rereads, standing far back



and reading quickly from a distance, moving in close and reading slowly line by line, reading again and again, knowing that the answers to all writing problems lie within the evolving text” (p. 151).

The teacher needs to model good writing and the students need to see good examples of writers performing their craft. Teachers teach in the writing workshop by showing students specific skills instead of just telling them about the skills. Students need to see teachers struggle to edit a writing piece and use a variety of strategies to adjust a composition. Teachers do not do justice to teaching writing if they allow students to believe that writing is easy for them and that they never have to rewrite before they are satisfied with their final draft. Graves (2003) suggests that, “We maintain their fictions by not writing ourselves. Worse, we lose out on one of the most valuable ways to teach the craft” (p. 43).

As a part of teaching writing, many teachers start each writing workshop with a short mini-lesson. Mini-lessons are often built around techniques that a teacher wants to incorporate into student writing or it can arise from errors that a teacher is seeing repeatedly during conferencing. Nathan, Temple, Juntunen, Temple (1989) suggests,

Focused lessons can be introduced spontaneously, sparked by an issue that emerges in a teacher’s conference with a single student. The teacher may find an issue in the student’s paper - something she has done really well, or is glaringly in need of correcting – and may decide to go over the issue with the

whole class (p. 72).

Mini-lessons closely resemble traditional teaching. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) state that, “Minilessons are short, focused, and direct. The teacher has something to teach, and she gathers together the students to teach it. The minilesson varies according to the need of the class...” (p. 10). Mini-lessons can occur at the beginning of writing workshop or during the course of the writing time. The beauty of presenting a mini-lesson is that the students can gather, hear the lesson, and then return to work on their writing in a very short time. The purpose of presenting mini-lessons is not to set the tone for the writing day but rather to instruct students in needed areas. Fletcher & Portalupi (2001) state that, “A mini-lesson is not meant to direct the course of action for the rest of the workshop. This is a time to introduce an important skill ..., but we should not expect students to spend the next forty minutes practicing it” (p. 11).

When teachers assist writers as they progress in their writing, they consider what constitutes good writing. Guidelines for good writing often address writing traits that are congruent with quality writing. Writing teachers often elicit the aid of the six-traits of writing for support and as a guideline when they teach and evaluate writing.

#### The six-traits of writing

With all that is presented in a writing workshop, how important is it to inundate the students with one more facet of writing – one more approach – one more layer of perfecting a piece of writing? Vicki Spandel (2005) says, “Six-trait writing is not a curriculum. It is not a program. It is a vision – a way of looking at writing that takes teachers and students (all writers) right inside the process to where the action is” (p. 1).

The idea of six-traits came from research by Paul Diederich in the 1960s (Spandel, 2005). Diederich wondered if people could agree on what would be considered good writing. He assembled a group of fifty individuals and had them assess student writing samples, group them into either effective, somewhat effective, and problematic. He finally asked them to list the criteria they used to make their decisions. The readers generally selected the same traits. The original six-trait rubric was designed in 1984 by a group of teachers – the Analytical Writing Assessment Committee. The group consisted of seventeen teachers from Beaverton, Oregon; Vicki Spandel was part of the original group (Culham, 2003; Spandel, 2005). The six-traits that were identified are: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions.

There are several reasons why it is helpful for a teacher to use the six-traits when teaching writing. Using the six-traits provides a common language for students and teachers across grade levels, schools and districts. Culham (2003) asserts that, “The goal of developing the model was to create a method for analyzing and responding to writing that results in a shared writer’s vocabulary – the traits” (p. 12). Spandel (2005) states that it is the shared vocabulary that turns us all into writing teachers and coaches and enhances our understanding of how writing works.

The six-traits also provide a consistent evaluation tool when we assess each piece of writing using a six-traits writing rubric. Spandel (2005) explains how rubrics are beneficial as an evaluation tool. She states, “Rubrics help because they give us a reference point, a safe harbor to which we (and our students) can return. And if our thinking or what we value changes over time, we can revise our rubrics to reflect that

new thinking” (p. 7). The Six-traits help guide the writing process. Culham (2003) suggests that the writing process is created through a flexible progression from start to finish. “It allows the writer to try out ideas, play with them, reshape and reorder them, start over, cut, paste, add and delete details, tinker and toy with language use, and create beautiful and delicious new phrases and sentences” (p. 21). When the six-traits are used in conjunction with a writing process the common language and understanding helps guide revisions. The traits help us identify what needs work, helps us target specific steps in the process that need revision and editing, and the traits provide a format students can learn what makes writing work effectively. Regardless of who is writing and for what purpose they are writing, the six-traits are visible in process. Spandel (2005) explains that, “Knowledge of the six traits has impact on student performance because all writers (not just those in K through 12) need strong, clear ideas, good organization, and compelling voice to make writing successful” (p. 11). Students’ writing will improve when they learn the six-traits of writing and use them to as they edit their writing. When students learn to evaluate their writing at a young age, it will impact their writing quality for life. Spandel (2005) points out that successful writing is not just measured by grades that are received in school. “I am talking about a larger measure of success – holding the attention of an audience, getting published, getting someone to buy what you have published, and most important of all, reaching or moving someone” (p. 11). Regardless of the writing process that works for each student, knowledge of six-trait writing will enhance that process. Students will begin to look at and evaluate their own writing more critically and completely. They will begin to write more independently and confidently

when they acquire knowledge of the potential process and steps that lead to quality writing. Spandel (2003) explains that the most important goal is to know that when we, “teach six-trait writing to students, we offer them a vision of writing proficiency that will serve them all their lives in any writing context.... It is about students becoming strong and confident writers in any context for any purpose” (p. 11).

The six-traits of writing is one of the key components necessary to develop a meaningful piece of writing. It takes all of the key components, a simple structure, time to write, the freedom to choose topics, an understanding of a writing process, time to conference during writing, and the six-traits of writing to produce quality writing when hosting a successful writing workshop. As teachers and researchers work to construct the writing workshop so that it is even more beneficial for students, movement is one idea that is incorporated within the writing block. Movement, in this case, refers to the students changing classrooms at each of the stages during the writing process.

### Movement

Movement is the key issue addressed in this study. While much has been written about the writing workshop, little or no research has been done that addresses moving, changing classrooms and using multiple teachers, during the writing workshop. Movement is important to learning and life, but what role does movement play in the writing workshop? While there is no research to verify the affects of movement during the writing workshop, there is research that documents student movement during the school day.

The obvious difference in a traditional writing workshop and the moving writing workshop is the movement. There are two significant connections to address when discussing movement in the school day. The first is the students' attitude toward moving or changing classrooms. The second is the learning benefits gained from moving.

Moving is an integral part of the day at the kindergarten through seventh grade Barnette Magnet School. The 1<sup>st</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in the school change classes every hour of the day for a majority of the day. The transitions that the students have to adjust to are similar to the adjustments middle school students make. When students transition from an elementary school, "They also often have a sense of unease about the relationships and structures awaiting them" (Odegaard, S. L. & Heath, J. A., 1992, p. 21). When students move to a new school setting they have many concerns centered on the new routine at a larger school. Changing classrooms throughout the day leads to some of the concerns. Odegaard, S. L. & Heath, J. A (1992) state that when listing the greatest areas of apprehension, "These issues included getting lost, being late to class, and the possibility of physical or verbal abuse by older students" (p.21). In the study conducted by Odegaard & Heath (1992), a majority of the students felt positive about having different teachers and working in different environments for various subjects. The study further showed that most students were excited about being in a new school environment and moving away from the self-contained classrooms. Odegaard & Heath do share that, "However, many students were concerned about how they were going to manage the process of moving from room to room" (p. 23). In a study conducted by Arowosafe & Irvin (1992), it stated that the adjustment period for students to a new school could last

from one day to a week and a half. It could even last as long as half of the school year. Several students in the study were asked if they felt like the adjustment was a natural process and they all thought that is was. Arowosafe & Irvin (1992) stated that, “The comfort levels rose as the students received help getting to classes, from friends (both old and new), identified at least one person they could go to for help, ... and became more familiar with the facility” (p. 18). Some of the ways suggested for alleviating the concerns were to allow the students and their parents to tour the school with a map and the student’s schedule, host a social before school starts in the fall, have teachers in the halls during passing periods to assist students, and start out the school year with a relaxed tardy policy. The study further suggested that a team of teachers work with specific groups of students and that the teachers have meeting times to plan and address needs as they arise (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Movement is also important in other ways.

Movement and physical activity are essential for student learning. Jensen (2005) explains how there is a strong link between exercise, movement, taking breaks, students having recess, stimulating activities, and students’ improved knowledge, and ability to reason. “Amazingly, the part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning” (p. 61). Students need to move during a class period. If students take breaks or just stand up and stretch, more oxygen-rich blood reaches the brain and improves productivity. While physical activities that cause the heart rate to elevate are the best form of movement for cognitive learning, it is important to build in opportunities for the students to perform activities in the classroom that requires them to

move and change seats (Jensen, 2005). The moving writing workshop provides students with opportunities to move to work cooperatively with others several times during the writing time, students move to computers and printers, and they transition to work with the teacher. Moving, and not just sitting in one place is an integral part of the moving writing workshop. While movement is important for all students, some students can only function at their optimal level when movement is linked with their learning.

It is well documented that movement and learning go hand in hand. It is equally a well-known fact that writing is an important skill for students to master. What is not known is the intersection at which movement and writing converge. This study seeks to document the benefits as the two parallel events merge and work in unison during the writing workshop. As a teacher-researcher in the writing workshop at the Barnette Magnet School, I will provide evidence through observation, documentation, interviews, and interactions to help authenticate the phenomenon of the moving writing workshop.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it. ~Toni Morrison

#### Introduction

This study looked at the implementation of a moving writing workshop at the Barnette Magnet School – 2005-06 school year. The questions that were addressed in this study were:

1. Does changing rooms during the writing process improve student writing?
2. Does the students' attitude toward writing change because of their participation in a moving writing workshop?

As a teacher-researcher, I chose to design my research as an ethnographic case study. Ethnography describes a culture. Creswell (2005) defines an ethnographic design as, “ qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (p.436). According to Creswell (2005) “qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes...” (p. 39). A culture-share group can arise from participation in activities and events (Creswell, 2005). My culture-share group consisted of selected 5/6 grade students at Barnette Magnet School that participated in the moving writing workshop.

A case study is an important type of in-depth ethnographic research that is based on multiple sources of data collection. The research can focus on individuals, groups, activities, or events (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2005). The research focuses on a bounded system. Creswell (2005) states that bounded means, “that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p. 439). My bounded system was the moving writing workshop at the Barnette Magnet School. I gathered data during the 2006-07 school year by tracking twelve 5/6 grade students while they participated in the moving writing workshop.

In order to conduct ethnographic research on a culture-share group, Creswell (2005) suggests that the researcher “spends considerable time ‘in the field’ interviewing, observing, and gathering documents about the group....” (p. 436). Research involves going to the research site and spending time observing how the group interacts. Spradley (1979) states that, “Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people” (p. 3). An ethnographic study is time intensive and involves in-depth research.

You conduct an ethnography when you have long-term access to this culture-sharing group so that you can build a detailed record of their behaviors and beliefs over time. You may be a participant in the group or simply an observer, but you gather extensive fieldnotes, interview many people, and collect letters and documents to establish the record of the culture-sharing group. (Creswell, 2005, p. 436)

Qualitative research is shaped by the way we view the culture-share group. The research is directed in particular ways based on the principles and ideas of the researcher. Elliot Eisner (1991) states, "Thus, the questions we ask, the categories we employ, the theories we use guide our inquiry; indeed, what we come to know about the world is influenced by the tools we have available" (p.28).

Eisner (1991) suggests six features that make up a qualitative study. The first is that a qualitative study needs to be field focused (Eisner, 1991). An educational qualitative study takes place in an environment where education takes place. The researcher conducts the research at the school and with the students and staff at the sight of the research. The researcher interacts and participates in the environment in order to gather the needed data for the research.

The Barnette Magnet School was my field site, the moving writing workshop was my gathering ground, and the classroom was my laboratory. I was as much a part of the research as the students. We worked together, we learned together, we grew together. We developed the moving writing workshop.

The second feature is that the researcher is an instrument in the study. According to Eisner (1991), "The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it" (p. 34). The researcher assesses what is important and what is not through perception and determines their significance. Individual researchers interpret situations based on their own background knowledge. The balance is provided in the research when the researcher uses evidence to ground their findings.

In order to produce quality research, I needed to be engaged in the research. I had to understand the inner workings of the workshop in order to detect the slightest changes that took place and determine their significance. I needed to have a balance of being an observer and a questioner. Many times I would sit and observe the students working, but it was not until I engaged them in conversation and interacted with them that the true depth and enjoyment of their work was revealed. The students would discuss their work with enthusiasm and animation. While they were telling their story, they would stop to write a sentence of something new they thought of to add more details to their story while articulating the future events to unfold.

The third of the features presented by Eisner (1991) is interpretive character. The interpretive character means that the researcher interprets the information they observe. Eisner (1991) points out, “One meaning of interpretation pertains to the ability to explain why something is taking place” (p. 35). For example, what message do the students receive when we set aside an hour a day for writing? At other times the researcher creates a new theory to explain events. Eisner (1991) further adds that a second meaning is, “qualitative researchers are interested in matters of motive and in the quality of experience undergone by those in the situation studied” (p. 35). For example, how does Joey feel when asked to share his piece in front of the class?

Because I was involved in the project I asked the question, why, many times more than I ever asked my students in the past. When I observed events I would take notes and place my own judgment on the situation. Later I liked to ask the students about the situation and compared their statement with my interpretation. I asked the students what

motivated them to write the piece they were working on. If they were working collaboratively with a student one day on a piece and not the next, why they were not working together anymore. I would delve into the students interactions by asking them about the students they chose to work with to hold a revise and response session for a piece of writing. Each time I formed an opinion and confirmed its validity was a potential situation for adjustments to the moving writing workshop when the findings called for change.

The fourth feature is the use of expressive language and personal voice in the text (Eisner, 1991). The researcher presents the qualitative research so that the reader can experience the emotion that is present in the study. Voice and empathy are important features of expressive language.

When I created bonds with the students and shared my personal writing, the students in turn shared more personal stories. Students wrote about the death of loved ones and pets and their extreme grief. They wrote about places that they wanted to visit and relatives that they missed and longed to see. They shared tragedies of having to move, fire and war. The students' shared their personal voice with passion and sincerity. My regret in my research is that I did not acquire permission to include the students' actual personal written pieces that would show the care and attention to details that the students placed on the pieces they created.

The attention given to particulars is the fifth feature of qualitative study. The researcher pays attention to details and the details are incorporated into the research

report. In describing the details, Eisner (1991) states that, “the classroom, the school, the teacher are not lost to abstraction” (p. 39).

I place a very high emphasis on knowing my students. Graves (2003) suggested an activity to assess how well you know your students. I worked to know the personal interest of my students and their likes and dislikes. I noticed when the students were not acting like, “themselves.” I provided assistance when students would not ask for help, but I knew they were frustrated or stuck because of their body language and avoidance tactics. Even with seeing a variety of students daily, I could notice changes in students’ behavior and attitude.

I also became very aware of the writing teachers’ demeanor when I spoke with them in the hallways and in meeting and could detect their times of joy and frustration through subtle comments. This was very important to me firstly because I wanted the moving writing workshop to be successful and secondly because I wanted it to stay afloat. If the writing staff was unhappy, the moving writing workshop was sure to be discontinued.

The sixth and final feature of qualitative studies involves judging their success. The role of the researcher is to make the study believable. The research is deemed believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility (Eisner, 1991). The researcher presents findings and works to persuade the reader that the findings are accurate.

Eisner’s six features fit into the design of my ethnographic case study. As a teacher at the school, I had regular access to the participants in the study during the

moving writing workshop. The moving writing workshop took place for one hour, Monday – Thursday. A lot of the work that I already performed as a teacher was very useful for my research. I already assessed if the students were progressing on their writing pieces at a reasonable rate. As a class, the students already kept portfolios of their writing. Each quarter I had the students look at the work in their portfolios, assess their own personal growth, choose their favorite piece, and share their work with their parents at parent-teacher conferences. Each quarter the students were also required to share at least a portion of one of their pieces from the year with the class. During the moving writing workshop, at the end of each writing day, students would volunteer to share something that they were working on or a piece that they had just completed. All of the tasks that the students performed became embedded in my research. As Hubbard & Power (1993) suggest, “Many of the records that you keep as part of ‘kidwatching’ evaluative strategies may be useful without any revision. Detailed notes from literature-group interactions or whole-class writing discussions may be ripe for analysis already” (p. 12). As a teacher-researcher it is often hard to find time while maintaining teaching to take notes. Often teachers can take notes during silent writing time, or jot brief notes and add more details later (Hubbard & Power, 1993). While working in the writing rooms, it was easy to quickly assess student growth. Each time students developed a new piece of writing, I could note which students incorporated information from mini lessons and from mistakes they made in previous writing pieces. Data collection was crucial to my research. Hubbard & Power (1993) state that, “The most important tool you have as a

researcher is your eye and view of classroom life. You need to look hard and deeply at yourself and students at work” (p. 10).

#### Methods of data collection and analysis

This ethnographic case study will use a grounded theory method to study the moving writing workshop at the Barnette Magnet School.

Essentially, grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. Throughout the research process, grounded theorist develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509)

Researchers use the grounded theory method to construct a theory that explains a broad topic. It also includes the process for gathering, evaluating, and analyzing the events or processes that take place within the topic overtime (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2005). Creswell (2005) stated that, “Because the theory is ‘grounded’ in the data, it provides a better explanation than a theory borrowed ‘off-the-shelf’ because it fits the situation, actually works in practice, is sensitive to individuals in a setting, and may represent all of the complexities actually found in the process” (p. 396).

Data collected through audio taped interviews, observational fieldnotes, teacher journals, conferencing notes, and work samples were triangulated and analyzed to document the benefits of the moving writing year at the Barnette Magnet School.



Hubbard & Power (1993) point out that the triangulation of data is when information from several sources is used to “build a compelling case for what you have discovered” (p. 92).

The data was analyzed through a systematic design of coding and categories were formed through constant comparative data analysis. The constant comparative method starts with a specific event and compares the event to new data, such as an observation or interview. The common events are grouped and coded. As more instances are coded, the coded information is formed into categories. This method of continually taking new data, revisiting the formerly collected data and comparing the two is a process embedded in Glaser and Strauss’s grounded theory method (Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hubbard & Power, 1993). The Grounded Theory Method allows for self-correction during the process. As data is compared, adjustments are made that affect the next data that is collected. Because the researcher is continually building categories and making adjustments, the researcher is always in-touch with the data.

Before the writing program was implemented, I tape recorded interviews with the participants individually regarding their background knowledge of a variety of writing programs and their attitude toward writing (See Appendix A). The participants were interviewed again at the middle of the study (See Appendix B) and a final interview was conducted at the end of the school year (See Appendix C). I interviewed the students during my prep periods, after school, and on Fridays during occasions when the students did not participate in the school-wide events. The interviews were always conducted one-on-one. I started with a standard set of questions; however, I allowed the students

latitude to guide the direction that the interview followed in regard to the writing program. I also documented how student participants' viewed themselves as writers when I interviewed them and combined their opinion with the other documentation collected throughout the writing year.

At the end of the school year, the data was analyzed again and the final detailed accounts of the students' changes during the moving writing workshop program at the magnet school are presented.

#### Selection of students

This study took place at the Barnette Magnet School. The new school assumed the building, which had been occupied since 1960 by Barnette Elementary School. The students that attended Barnette Magnet School were selected by lottery from interested students that lived in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. A portion of the students that attended Barnette Elementary School the previous year and that lived in the Barnette attendance district, were grandfathered in to attend the new Barnette Magnet School without participating in the lottery if they chose. The students for the study were selected from the three classes of 5/6 grade students – approximately seventy students – at the Barnette Magnet School.

When this school year started, I only knew three of the students in the 5/6 grades. My goal in selecting students was to select a fair representation of the student body in the 5/6 grade. My criteria for selection was to have a balanced number of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, males and females, varied writing abilities, and ethnicity groups. I also wanted to include students that had joined the school from multiple venues. I looked for students that had

attended Barnette Elementary School the previous year, students that had transferred from other schools in the district, students that were new to Alaska, and students that attended private school or were home schooled. Because of the moving nature of the school, it was easier than in a traditional school to meet the students. The writing workshop started early in the school year – so all of the students circulated through my classroom. I had to carefully observe the students and make my best educated guesses as to the right students to invite to participate in the study. Even before the study officially started, I had to employ observational skills – the same skills I would later use throughout the study.

At the beginning of the school year, all of the classroom teachers were required to evaluate all of the students in their classroom and to determine the students' level of proficiency in math and reading. I also included a writing sample in my early evaluations. Each classroom teacher received a form listing their current students' performance levels showing, far below proficient, below proficient, proficient, and advanced from the previous years CSSA - SBA (Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessment – Standards Based Assessment) testing in reading, writing, and math. All of this information helped me when selecting students for my study to ensure that I included students with varied writing abilities and students that had never participated in a moving writing workshop as well.

People learn their culture by interacting with other members of their culture. They listen to them, observe, and later use that information to form their own opinions. Spradley (1979) suggests that, “the ethnographer employs this same process of going

beyond what is seen and heard to infer what people know. It involves reasoning from evidence (what we perceive) or from premises (what we assume)” (p. 8). I started with inferences and combined them with the information that I obtained from observing, note taking, and data collection, and then compared the findings. Spradley (1979) further suggests that, “In doing field work, ethnographers make cultural inferences from three sources: (1) from what people say; (2) from the way people act; and (3) from the artifacts people use” (p. 8).

After my careful selection process, I identified twelve students to track through the writing year at the Barnette Magnet School. The students consisted of six males and six females – this included three males and three females from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. The study included students that were Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Indian, Eskimo, and Asian. Several students that participated in the study were of mixed ethnicity. Of the students participating in the study some of the students fit more than one of the following categories. Six of the students transferred from schools in the district, five of the students had attended Barnette at some point in their school years, two students attended a school outside of Alaska last year, and two students had attended private school or home-school the previous year. After receiving permission from the IRB (Institutional Review Board), parents and the students, I was ready to start my research.

#### Teacher-Researcher

In the normal course of a school day, teachers often collect data about students, analyze it, reflect on it, and then adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of the

students in their classroom. Teachers use a variety of methods to gather the information from anecdotal records, checklist, observations, formative, holistic, and summative assessment in their quest to assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. As teachers ponder and question events that take place in the classroom a further desire to know sparks a change in the way the classroom is viewed. Hubbard & Power (1993) report that, “Teachers throughout the world are developing professionally by becoming teacher-researchers, a wonderful new breed of artists-in-residence. Using our own classrooms as laboratories and our students as collaborators, we are changing the way we work with students...” (p. xiii). The trend toward teachers as researchers is very empowering and recognizes the role teachers can play in research. Smith (1993) explains that, “Teacher research by its very nature acknowledges that teachers are capable of carrying out critical inquiry about the meaning of their work and of their students’ learning” (p.37). While many teachers devise strategies for tracking students’ progress over the school year, few consider themselves as researchers. According to Hubbard & Power (1993), “By becoming researchers, we hope to find strategies to develop more principled classroom practice” (p. xiv). Teachers are always looking for ways to improve their teaching and the structure of their classroom. When discussing research, Goswami & Stillman (1987), suggests that research is about, “looking – and looking again. The new kind of REsearch would not mean going out after new ‘data,’ but rather REconsidering what is at hand” (p.30). Teachers work closely with students day in and day out. They become very familiar with the students and the students become comfortable with the teacher. This daily presence is invaluable to research. “... we

teachers bring a depth of awareness to our data that outside researchers cannot begin to match. We know our schools, our students, our colleagues, and our learning agendas. Our research is grounded in this rich resource base” (Hubbard & Power, 1993, p. xiv). Teacher-research is about being open to change and daring to look ahead at the possibilities. It is about having questions, pursuing the answers, and using the findings to benefit our students and often our colleagues as well. Goswami & Stillman (1987) state that, “We do not need new information: we need to think about the information we have. We need to interpret what goes on when our students respond to one kind of assignment and not to another ...” (p.30).

Timothy J. Lensmire (1994) shares his challenges as a teacher-researcher in his book, When Children Write: Critical Re-visions of the Writing Workshop. Lensmire (1994) states that, “Before I started this project, I had largely thought of myself as a teacher and a researcher, as if I were two different people at different times, or as if there would not be overlaps and conflicts among these roles ...” (p. 23). While it is an added bonus to participate each day and conduct your research with the students that are considered part of your research, it is also a large part of the challenge. Lensmire (1994) writes, “Being a teacher put demands of where and when I could look at things while I was teaching” (p. 32). Traditional researchers in the classroom do not have the same constraints and research challenges. Lensmire (1994), further explains his frustration by explaining that, “Whereas a more traditional classroom researcher can sit at the back of the room and make decisions as to when and where to attend, my vision and attention were often tied to my activity and responsibility as a teacher” (p. 32). Even though it is a

challenge being a teacher and a researcher simultaneously, it is rewarding and it still affords the opportunity to gather data from multiple venues during the course of the day.

In research, it is important to use more than one source to formulate your findings and conclusions. Hubbard & Power, 1993 state that, “When you use multiple sources to support your findings, you can build a compelling case for what you have discovered” (p. 92). Being a teacher-researcher in the classroom allows for a triangulation of data collection. Creswell (2005) points out that, “Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., observational fieldnotes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g. documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 252). Hubbard & Power (1993) also point out that, “The richer the database, the more possibilities you have for triangulation” (p. 94). In his work, Lensmire (1994) gathered four types of data. Lensmire (1994) shares that, “I would have teacher planning notes; fieldnotes; an audiotape of the day’s teacher-student writing conference, ... opening meeting and sharing time; and photocopies of any children’s stories I came in contact with that day in conferences or whole-class sessions” (p. 36).

The reward of being a teacher-researcher comes when the data that has been collected unveils answers to the research questions. Often the research and the conclusion change the existing way of thinking. At times the research affects the community within the school, which in turn affects the community at large. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) conducted an ethnographic study of two communities. When she was able to share her findings about how language was used in the two communities with local

teachers, some changed the way they approached teaching. Heath (1983) writes, “Some teachers began to come up with ideas of how to alter their teaching methods and materials to accommodate these ways with the mainstream school-oriented ways of approaching tasks” (p. 284).

Conducting work as a teacher-researcher is an exciting journey of discovery. Once the data was collected the job of locating the messages was equally rewarding and life changing. Hubbard & Power (1993) point out that, “The business of getting to the true vision of what you have found in your research involves sifting through data, seeing and seeing again the truths underlying the busy-ness of classroom life” (p. 96).

As a teacher-research in the Magnet School’s first year in existence, I was excited about documenting the benefits that students received and the changes that took place as they participated in the moving writing workshop. I entered the journey with high expectations as a year of learning and personal growth as a writing teacher.

### Limitations

Being a teacher-researcher in the study allowed wonderful opportunities for involvement in the data collection. However, it also created limitations. My role as a teacher during the moving writing workshop at the school was to daily staff one of the writing rooms. Weekly, the students circulated to each of the rooms as they proceeded through the writing process. In this format, I might only see some students once in a week since the students were not allowed to switch rooms during the hour of the writing day. It also limited the writing stages that I could observe. To help minimize this problem, the building substitute periodically staffed my classroom so that I could be an



observer in the other rooms. Observing in other rooms had many benefits. I had a chance to see the students more often, it allowed me to see more of the process on a given piece of writing, and I was able to observe the students participating in the moving writing workshop and interacting in different rooms with students and teachers.

The school year started with the entire 5/6 grade students usually having the same assignment with the same requirements and rubric as decided by the team of 5/6 grade teachers. As a 5/6 grade team we thought that working together and presenting the same lesson would make the writing time easier for the writing teachers. We used the state's Grade Level Expectations (GLE) to guide us in our selection of genres and topics. The students in the other two 5/6 grades were not required to turn in their rough drafts. I, however required my students to turn in all of the drafts with their final copy to be placed in their writing portfolios. I asked the students in the study that were from other classes to give me their drafts and a copy of their final paper. It was hard to gather first drafts and final papers from students that were not in my class; especially the first drafts. Often they forgot and their work was either thrown away or taken home.

With the information that I was able to obtain, I felt confident that I would be able to make an evaluation that was substantiated by evidence from many different approaches. After I gathered my data, the next step was to triangulate the information and determine my findings and conclusion.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

You write to communicate to the hearts and minds of  
others what's burning inside you. And we edit to let the fire show  
through the smoke. ~Arthur Polotnik

#### Introduction

Writing workshops teach students to write through a set of steps – a process. The process includes brainstorming, drafting, revising and responding, editing, and publishing. Over ten years ago, the original designers of the moving workshop also followed the standard writing process steps as they designed the rooms that students would use to complete a writing piece. When our school first established its moving workshop, we also had rooms where students would work as they moved through the process of developing a piece of writing. The moving to different classrooms and hands-on design of the school ensured that students were already accustomed to moving, working with a variety of staff and students, and changing classrooms every hour. Because of this, I assumed switching to a writing room at a set time of day was not a difficult change for the students; but I wanted to be sure. The difference that also needed to be documented was that the students did not change rooms in any set order while working on a writing assignment – the room assignments changed week to week. These issues would be addressed through my research while gathering the answers to my research questions. The questions that I wanted to address through the year of writing were:

1. Does changing rooms during the writing process improve student writing?
2. Does the students' attitude toward writing change because of their participation in a moving writing workshop?

As my literature review showed, having a consistent time for writing and using a workshop approach was beneficial to student learning and enjoyment of writing (Fiderer, 1993; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Ray, 2001). It also helped students when they were introduced to the writing process and allowed the freedom to learn the process that worked for them. The more students had the opportunity to practice writing the better they were and the more comfortable they were with adapting to their own style.

We started the writing year at the Barnette Magnet School by transitioning the students through mini-lessons on the writing process and structure of the moving writing workshop. We wanted to ensure that the students would know what to expect in each of the moving writing workshop rooms as they traveled with a writing project. Each room also was equipped with a chart on the wall to act as a guide to assist the students. The chart detailed the steps in the writing process. Once the initial lessons were completed we embarked on our first experiences with a moving writing workshop. I gathered as much data as possible during the year. Once the year ended I began the important task of analyzing the data and determining what facts the data revealed.

### Findings

While I analyzed the data, several key themes emerged that addressed my research questions. My first question was, Does changing rooms during writing improve student writing?

All of the students' improved in some area through participating in the moving writing workshop. The students improved in a variety of areas. They gained in confidence as writers, their attitude toward writing, use of the six-traits, writing ability, and their test scores verified improvement. During the writing year, the students believed they were better writers. They wanted to share their writing and they were more confident when helping each other with their writing pieces. The students enjoyed writing. They looked forward to the end of the day so that they could continue to work on their writing pieces. The students were more conscious of the six traits when they wrote. They added more voice and word choice to their writing. They worked to correct any writing convention errors when they edited their writing. When the students' confidence, attitude and attention to the six-traits improved, their actual writing ability improved. The students writing was more thoughtful, creative, and enjoyable to read. One of the ways that the students writing improvements were documented was by their performance on the Standards Based Assessment (SBA), test scores.

When I looked at the Standards Based Assessment (SBA), test scores, I compared the students' scores from 2004-05 to this years 2005-06 test scores. In some cases, students from other states or school districts did not take the SBA test in the previous year and other scores were not available. When possible, I used the scores and evaluations that were in the students' files from other tests and attempted to compare the findings. The SBA test includes students' placement levels as advanced, proficient, below proficient, and far below proficient. This year, of the twelve students in the study, four students scored as advanced writers, six students scored as proficient writers and two

students scored as below proficient writers. When comparing the students' writing test from last year only one student's category was lower, however, the student was still a proficient writer. Several students moved up one category from the previous year. While other students stayed in the same category, their score in the category was higher. Overall the students in the study did very well with a majority of the students scoring in the advanced and proficient categories. After completing the SBA assessment I asked the students how they felt about the test. The students stated that they thought they had done well in the writing section of the test.

After analyzing the data, and rethinking my question, with the research that I conducted, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether moving during the writing process was the factor that caused the changes. I was unable to site definitive facts to prove that the actual act of moving during the writing workshop improved student writing. In order to substantiate the fact that moving was the contributing factor that helped students' writing improve, additional research would be necessary such as an experiment with a control group. The data did however show that the physical act of moving did impact the students' writing. Several themes emerged through the interviews and observations. The routine steps that the student followed while participating in the moving writing workshop had an impact on student writing.

### Structure

The first theme that was evident in the data was that the moving writing workshop provided structure for the students. When the students moved to a new room each time they were at a new writing stage, it reinforced the writing process. When one student was

asked what she thought of the moving writing workshop, she said that it was, “Good, I like to move room to room because you get to do different things.” When I asked her for more details she said, “In the writing process they are doing different things. I like the process of drafting, editing, and revising, like that.” During the moving writing workshop, the writing rooms focused on one stage of the writing process. All of the students and the teacher in the room were focused on the same stage in the writing process. Another student explained how he felt about the structure of the moving writing workshop. He states, “It started out kind of slow because it was new. But now I am getting use to knowing what the next step is and which room to go to.” When students were provided with the structure, they learned to flow within the structure. The structure and the moving provided the scaffolding that the students needed to improve their writing. One student was asked what he learned during the moving writing workshop and to describe areas where he had improved. He stated, “Going through the writing process – I never heard of revise and response before. Going through the steps helped me improve my writing because it helped me know what to do the next time.” The structure of the moving writing workshop helped students learn a standard writing process.

Our structure for the moving writing workshop included providing the students with a set time four days a week to write and rooms to travel through the writing stages. When the students learned the structure and could trust that writing would happen at a set time and that they would have time to work on their piece the next day, they thought about their piece when they were away from them. Sometimes the students would ask questions about their writing piece at times during the day, before writing time. If they

finished their work early, they would ask to work on their writing piece. I also often heard the students talking about their writing piece with other students throughout the day. The students did not feel rushed to have to finish a writing piece in one day. The students' writing improved because they were provided with the time within the structure to complete a piece. When asked about the time that was provided for writing, one student added, "Sometimes I think it is too short, other times just right, some days I get stuck and I need more time. I like knowing that we will write the next day."

Once the students adjusted and felt comfortable with the structure they relaxed and could concentrate more on their writing. In order to work in the moving writing workshop, the students had to work with a variety of students. While learning to work with other students within the structure, the students also had fun with their peers.

#### Social and fun

The second theme that came from the research was that 'moving' during the moving writing workshop provided a social atmosphere for the students and it was fun. It can have a negative connotation when we think of students being overly social while completing schoolwork, however during the moving writing workshop, communication was a key component. I asked one student how he felt about writing. He said, "It's fun since we have writing workshop." I followed up by asking him if he liked writing before writing workshop. His next reply was, "I only wrote when I had to write or when I had nothing else to do at my house." Again I wanted to know what made the moving writing workshop fun for this student. In our next interview when asked about the moving writing workshop he added, "It is fun when we are allowed to work with other people

when we don't get something." As we discussed his response, the student added that he enjoyed having his peers help him with his work. He found that he had fewer mistakes in his work when he went to editing or revise and response if he had help along the way from his peers when he was writing his piece.

Even though the students used the moving writing workshop as a time to visit with their friends, they generally had a good balance between socializing and working. The students knew that the assignments were due on certain dates and they worked to meet the deadlines. The students were very creative in how they arranged to visit with their friends. In the writing rooms, when the students finished the stage they were working on they were not allowed to move to another room. The students did, however, have the option to start working on the next stage in the room they were in, if there was still time left in the day. In my writing room I observed students, mostly girls that had finished their piece for the stage that they were working on, put their piece away and help their friends. The students wanted to make sure that their friends would be ready to move to the next stage with them the next day. I observed them encouraging each other to stay on task and write, giving suggestions, and making changes to writing pieces. The students were always happy when they finished before the class ended.

Part of being social and working with peers is having friends share information in a manner that students understand. One student stated that she works with her peers more than she works with teachers. She stated, "I work with kids more because they know from a kid's perspective. If the teacher says something I might say, 'I don't get it.' Then the kid would say, 'she means this.'" Some students prefer working with other students



more than with a teacher. Students have a way of explaining things differently than how teachers share information. It is beneficial for students to get both perspectives.

Because all of the students moved during the day and the writing time was at the end of the day, the students saw each other in the halls when they were headed to their next class. I heard students asking each other what writing room they would be in later that day. Often students made plans to see if they could meet in the same room. When students did work in the same rooms together, some would sit beside each other on the floor on beanbags and draft. While they were working they would share a funny section of their piece with a friend, ask how to spell a word, and ask each other for suggestions. The students held conferences with each other throughout the writing process.

In traditional writing workshops, students have the potential to be social and have fun. The difference in the moving writing workshop was that the students could meet with their friends from other classes. Even though the students tried to manipulate the structure so that they could work with their friends, it did not always work. Because all of the seventy students in the 5/6 grade moved daily, the students always had a different mix of students in their writing rooms. The teachers in the writing rooms matched students to work with each other. Different students were asked to edit each other's work in the editing room. In the revise and response room the teacher often helped structure the groups to provide a balance of writing abilities. When the teachers structured the revise and response groups, the students were certain to hear a variety of writing styles and glean fresh ideas for their own writing pieces.

### Ideas

The fact that the students gathered new ideas from meeting with their peers while physically moving during the moving writing workshop was a recurring theme that I noticed in the interviews and writing samples. The students benefited from meeting with a variety of students and hearing different writing styles when students edited each other's work and while holding revise and response groups. One student stated that when he hears a piece during revise and response, "It makes me think of something I could write on my next story. I write myself a note with the ideas." When struggling writers have the opportunity to hear proficient and advanced writers work they have examples that help them improve their work. One student stated that she liked when students shared their writing pieces. She stated that, "You get to learn other words and see what they are doing." Another student stated that he changed his piece on two different occasions when he heard the way that other students used words in their writing piece.

Finding topics to write about is often hard for students. When students listen to each other they can get ideas for topics that they would also like to write about. One student stated, "Sometimes listening gives me an idea to write about when I have nothing to write about." Another student stated that she thought it was very brave of students to share their writing piece in front of the class and that it helped her to hear their ideas. She added, "If they have ideas, I think, 'oh that's a good idea,' and I make it my own."

The students' benefit from moving during the moving writing workshop because they hear many more ideas than they would in a traditional writing workshop. In a traditional classroom the students work with approximately twenty-four students. In the

moving writing workshop the student had the potential to hear ideas from seventy different writers during the course of the year.

Having a topic to write about was essential for proceeding during the writing process. The students came up with their topics in various ways. Some students consulted their peers while others had their own ideas.

Not all students felt the same about working with others to gather ideas or moving at all during the writing workshop. For some students moving during the writing workshop was confusing.

### Confusing

When addressing the question as to whether moving improved student writing, it was no surprise that confusion during moving developed as a theme from the research. Moving and changing rooms was confusing to the students. The main reason that led to the confusion was the design of our moving writing workshop. The assignment of our writing rooms during the moving writing workshop did not follow a set pattern. Each day a writing room had the potential to be assigned as a different room. In our moving writing workshop, the teachers did not change rooms; the room assignment was changed. The special education teacher coordinated the moving writing workshop. At the end of each day, the writing teachers would give her a list of the students from their room and the writing stage that they needed the next day. Some time during the next day she would e-mail the writing staff and let us know what writing rooms we would host that day, based on the students' needs. Later in the day, just before the students changed rooms for the moving writing workshop, I would call out room assignments for the day.

The students were often confused when they left their classrooms to switch to a writing room. They would return to their classroom teacher and ask again where they needed to go. One student stated that it was confusing knowing which writing room to attend. The student said this because we did not put up signs for the rooms and the rooms changed daily. Another student stated that the moving writing workshop was like a traditional writing workshop except you move. “The downside is knowing where to go, sometimes teachers moved and you had to figure out where the room moved to.” One of the writing teachers was not a classroom teacher and she did not have a classroom. The students started the year meeting with her in the band room. One day, without notice, the room was switched to a classroom; this, of course, was confusing for the students. Another part-time teacher at the school worked during the writing workshop. At times she was unable to attend and we would be one room short for the writing day. This again was confusing for the students. They would show up at the room that they expected to work in, only to find the door locked. Even though the teachers had told the students the room assignments. The students often did not pay attention and would go where they thought the room they needed would be.

When students were confused about changing rooms, several students thought that it would be easier if they did not have to change rooms during the writing process.

#### Staying in one writing room

A theme that developed through my research was that three of the twelve students in the study wanted to stay in one writing room and conduct a traditional writing workshop. Two other students in the study stated reasons to stay in one room but where

ambivalent about moving versus staying in one room. The students stated different reasons for wanting to stay in one writing room. One student felt like changing rooms was a waste of time. When discussing not changing rooms, she states, “I think it was easier because we didn’t have to take time to go to the room then write and then come back. We had like 45 minutes of writing because it took two minutes to get there, and then you have to start cleaning up like five minutes before. When we are here (in our classroom) we get ready and start writing – so we pretty much have an hour.” While changing rooms was considered confusing and a waste of time, other students were very uncomfortable working with a changing group of students. One student stated, “It was better to go in one room because you know most of the people. Like, if you are in revise and response and you don’t know anyone it is sort of hard because you won’t know their name to write down on the paper (the revise and response form)– you would have to ask them. It is sort of confusing, too. It is scary and intimidating to work with people that you do not know.” Another student stated that she just liked, “staying in one room.” She said that it was just a personal choice. She did not mind having all of the different teachers, she just did not like working with all of the different students. One student was ambivalent about changing rooms. Even though he said it did not matter to him, he stated that if you do not change room, “you didn’t have to move around the hallways just to get to another room and essentially do the same thing.” When asked if he liked moving, he responded, “It was okay.” Even though he stated later that it was, “fine either way,” he said that moving made it easier to goof around. He felt that the accountability was better with one teacher. Finally, he stated that staying in one room allowed students to, “be

with their friends and bond with kids in their own class instead of everyone.” Two other students stated that it did not matter to them. They both felt like we should have both the moving and the traditional writing workshop and switch off between the nine week quarters in the school year. They believed that the students benefited from both experiences. A final student stated that moving was, “a lot like the way the school works. Moving for writing is kind of weird.”

While I could not prove that moving helped improve the students’ writing, several themes did arise from the data as a result of the students having multiple teachers during the moving writing workshop. These themes did impact the students’ writing.

### Variety

The students liked the variety of having different teachers during the moving writing workshop. Teachers have different methods of presenting information and the students’ benefited from having the information presented to them in a variety of ways. Students responded better to different teaching styles. Writing in the moving writing workshop benefited students because they were able to receive instruction in a method that appealed to their different learning styles. When asked about having multiple teachers, one student stated that it was, “Awesome because you get to meet new teachers. Different people do different things and it gives you different ideas to write about.” The students believed that teaching during the writing workshop was a challenge for the teachers. It is nice when teachers worked in the moving writing workshop and only had one step in the process to address in a writing room. The students also recognized that they received more assistance from teachers during the moving writing workshop. When

discussing having multiple teachers, one student stated, “It is good because one teacher can not do all of the things at one time.” Along with differences in the teachers’ styles, the teachers also provided their own strengths in writing.

### Strengths

During the writing workshop, the students recognized that each of their writing teachers had their own strengths in writing. The theme of the teachers’ strengths came up in the students’ interviews and in my observations. One student stated that she, “Didn’t mind having the different teachers. They have different opinions of writing and you can learn different things.” Background knowledge and training contributed to the information that the teachers incorporated in their teaching. One boy commented that, “You get their point of view of writing” when he discussed having multiple teachers. Along with the benefits of the teachers’ differences, having multiple teachers with multiple strengths was also beneficial for the students and teachers. One student felt that having multiple teachers was, “Easier – some teachers are different. Some know more about one thing than others, they check spelling differently.” All of the students did not see having a variety of teachers as a benefit.

### Difficult adjustments

While having multiple teachers with a variety of strengths can be a benefit, two students did not think that it was always good. Having multiple teachers was difficult because the teachers gave different suggestions for fixing a piece of writing. One student commented that, “You change to one teacher’s opinion and then another teacher has a different opinion.” The students worked on one stage of writing in a room with one

teacher. The student would work and make the changes that the teacher suggested. Once the changes were made the student was ready to move to another writing stage, and room the next day. The next day, it was possible that the next teacher would have suggestions for changes; changes that were different from the teacher the day before. The students had some frustration at having to rewrite their work based on a variety of suggestions. One student commented that it was, “hard to adjust to the different styles quickly.” Working with a variety of teachers was often too much for some students. Given a choice, the students wanted to only work with one teacher.

#### Stay with one teacher

Some students had a preference of the teacher they liked working with to complete writing pieces during the writing process. This theme was evident in my observations. Having to adjust to several teachers was too much for some students. One of the students in my study asked me if she could just stay in my room for the entire writing process. I recognized that working with different teachers and moving was too much for her, so I e-mailed the other writing teachers and let them know that she was going to stay in my room. For her and other students it was hard to have to explain their writing piece to another teacher each day and to have several teachers giving them advice. Other students did not ask if they could stay in one room with one teacher, they just went to the rooms that they wanted. When they were discovered, they would comment pleadingly that they just wanted to stay with the one teacher. The students would continue by saying that they would be quiet and work, and that they would not be any trouble. In most cases, the teachers would let the students stay.



Many students enjoyed having multiple teachers while other students preferred working with one teacher. For a third group of students, the teacher they worked with did not matter.

#### Does not matter

Two students seemed to take it all in stride. Both students in the study commented that it really did not matter to them what room they were in nor which teacher they worked with to complete a writing assignment. One of the students commented, “It really doesn’t matter to me” when asked about having multiple teachers. Both students did not mind changing rooms and having different teachers. They thought that all of the teachers were helpful and that they could also rely on the other students in the room. The second student commented that it really did not matter to him what room he worked in, nor which teacher he worked with. He commented about the writing rooms, “I like computers and they all have computers.”

The students moving during the writing workshop and having multiple teachers both contributed to the students’ writing improving. However, the facts show that it is impossible with the information gathered through my research to prove that changing rooms was the factor that caused the students’ writing to improve. While all of the students’ improved in some area in their writing, the question still remained regarding the students attitude toward writing.

The second question addressed in this study was, does the students’ attitude toward writing change because of their participation in a moving writing workshop? Again, whether students’ attitude toward writing improved because they participated in a

moving writing workshop could not be proven from my research. The data did, however, reveal evidence that the students' attitude toward writing did improve. One area that improved was the student's own opinion about their writing.

### Student opinion

The first theme that was evident from the research was the students' own opinion of their writing from the beginning of the study and how it changed by the end of the study. At the beginning of the school year I asked each student in an interview if they considered themselves a poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent writer. At the end of the study I asked, "When you go to a new classroom next year, do you think that the teacher will think that you are a poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent writer?" Of the twelve students in the study only three of the students in the study did not say they improved; they scored themselves the same as they did at the beginning of the study. At the beginning of the study the students were tentative with their responses. At the end of the study the students spoke very confidently about their writing. At the beginning of the study, one girl commented that her writing was, "Not really good at all." When asked at the end of the study, she stated what she thought her teacher next year would think of her writing. She stated, "They will think it is good. Because in fifth grade I wrote more than I did last year and that helped improve my writing." When interviewed at the beginning of the year, one boy responded by starting to say that he was a fair writer. At the last second, he changed and said that he was a good writer. When I asked him why he switched he did not know. At the end of the study the same student said that he was a very good writer. He commented, "My writing is creative. I like to write about fantasy

stuff.” One girl at the beginning of the study stated that she felt like she was, “Good, because I don’t know if I am very good. I just think I’m good.” At the end of the study the same student discussed what type of writer she feels her teacher will think she is next year. She stated, “I hope very good because I use a lot of description. I think I use a lot of description and description matters. My word choice is better and I can spell better.” Every student in the study had something positive to say about his or her writing. Even the students that did not score themselves higher at the end of the study had something positive to say about their writing. One of the things that changed the students’ attitude about writing was that they liked the topics they chose.

#### Choice/assignments

When I interviewed the students I asked them if they enjoyed writing this year. The main reasons that students gave that helped improve their attitude toward writing were the projects they were assigned to write about and when they were able to choose their own topics. The students commented that in the past they had to write about the topics that the teachers assigned. This year the students were allowed to choose some of their own topics. One student commented that what she enjoyed the most about writing this year was that she, “Wrote different things. I liked writing about my own choices and some assigned writing.” At the beginning of the school year the students commented that they did not want to write about their own choice topics. One student commented that, “I usually can’t think of anything to write about so I like being given a topic.” At the end of the study, the same student stated that he liked choosing his own topic. Toward the end of the year he developed a character to include in a story. He collaborated with two other

students and they wrote a series of adventure stories. Graves (2003) stated that it is essential that students learn to choose their own topics. When students learn to choose their topics wisely they gain a strong link between voice and subject. Another student also commented at the beginning of the study, "I like having specific topics more because I don't know what to write about." As the year progressed I watched the student develop many creative, well written stories. Her opinion of her writing and her enjoyment of writing increased dramatically and she loved to choose her own topics. When I asked her what she enjoyed about writing this year, she commented, "Because we write different things. If the teachers (last year) wanted us to write, it wouldn't be 'write whatever you want,' it would be write on a topic or a report and it wasn't fun. But here we get to write whatever we want or if you give us a topic." It was interesting to notice that her attitude toward writing improved because she was allowed to choose some of her own topics. The students in the moving writing workshop had many assigned writing projects and research papers. What seemed to make the difference was the variety of also allowing the students to choose their own topics.

The moving writing workshop benefited student writing. Any time added emphasis is placed on writing, students have the potential to improve. The students were introduced to and practiced writing following a writing process.

No matter how much I write, the students can say it best. One of the things that I enjoyed the most about my research was learning things from the students that I normally would not have learned. A student that started out the year struggling with topics to write about and going through the process said it best. She commented, "I learned that it is

hard and it takes time to make it perfect, if you want it perfect. It takes patience, if you don't have anything to write about you can't just get mad, you just think through what you can do."

In my last interview of the year, I asked a student to give some words of advice to future students. He smiled and said, "Don't panic! If you get tired of writing and then it gets boring and you don't feel like writing anymore." The students' advice was not only good for students, but for me also. I took their words to heart as I pieced together all of the facts that I learned through my teacher-researcher year. The student was right, it was hard and it did take time to make it perfect. As I worked I smiled when I thought about the students and I tried not to panic.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

You don't write because you want to say something, you write because you've got something to say. ~ F. Scott Fitzgerald

#### Introduction

Assisting students as they learned to improve their writing was an important job. Through research and trial and error, we worked to find the best ways to meet all students' learning needs. The writing year at the Barnette Magnet School was successful. The moving writing workshop fit in well with the philosophy and mission of the school and was beneficial to the students. With some simple changes and adjustments to the format, the moving writing workshop would be even better.

#### Some needed changes

One of the first changes that needed to be implemented would alleviate some students' confusion. The students were confused about which room to go to for their needed stage in the writing process because we changed the room assignments each week. The original designers of the moving writing workshop placed signs listing the stages of writing outside of the classrooms. The classrooms remained the same for the entire year while the teachers moved to the different rooms. Remaining consistent would make it easy to leave supplemental materials in the room all year that supported a writing stage if one room hosted the same stage week after week. This change would also add structure that would help students that struggled with moving during the writing workshop.

The crux of what makes or breaks a moving writing workshop program is the staff. The classroom teachers need to participate during the writing time in order for a workshop to be successful. Having the classroom teachers participate would add one more layer of structure missing in our moving writing workshop. The teachers would add some consistency for staff and they could easily flow into their own assignments with students. The workshop also needs more staff than just a few classroom teachers. More staff allows for smaller classrooms, more writing rooms, and more assistance for the students. Finally the staff, at least the classroom teachers, need to have planning time to coordinate assignments, mini-lessons, and to make adjustments as needed.

#### Things I noticed

Most of the students in the study stated that they enjoyed writing more this year and that their writing improved. The students said that they enjoyed writing because we wrote more and placed a higher emphasis on writing than previous years, they were allowed to choose their topics, and they enjoyed the writing workshop and the moving writing workshop. The students enjoyed working with each other and getting positive feedback about their writing.

At the end of the school year the students threw away many papers and things in their folders. I did not see one student throw away their writing portfolios. The students valued their writing. They talked about rewriting or adding to their stories and about writing books. The students were truly writing because they enjoyed writing.

### Comments from the writing teachers

One of the hardest things that the writing teachers, besides me, had to contend with was that they were not classroom teachers. The writing teachers did not have any say in creating or assessing the writing assignments. It was frustrating because often the writing teachers did not see the final pieces depending in the writing rooms that they staffed. They commented that it would have been nice to see how some of the pieces looked when they were finished. I asked the writing teachers if they thought the students made writing improvements. The teachers felt like the students made improvement however, some teachers really did not feel like they could make a specific statement because they only saw small portions of the writing pieces in process and not the completed pieces.

Working as a writing teacher in the moving writing workshop was less stressful, in some ways, than running a traditional workshop alone. Working in one writing room and concentrating on one step in the process with a smaller number of students are key points in favor of the moving writing workshop. Having to teach daily with a changing group of students, varied personalities, and monitor multiple writing assignments, while not knowing what grammar and writing lessons the classroom teachers had already presented was a challenge for writing teachers in the moving writing workshop.

Some of the writing teachers, like the students, felt that the writing workshop needed a balance between moving and not moving and that the students needed to be able to write freely and not have to take every piece through the process.



Despite the challenges, all of the writing teachers believed that the moving writing workshop was beneficial to the students. They also agreed that the moving writing workshop could work in future years with some changes and regular adjustments as needed. Most would recommend a moving writing workshop and would participate again.

### Recommendations

I would enjoy participating in a ‘moving’ writing workshop again. It takes a large commitment from classroom teachers. To be successful, a writing workshop takes time. Time is a precious commodity in the school day. After participating in writing workshops and the moving writing workshop, I feel that the student learning that took place was worth the time. The reading and writing component, the editing practice, revising, and working with other students are huge factors in favor of hosting a moving writing workshop.

The evidence was overwhelming that document the benefits of hosting a traditional writing workshop. But, what made a ‘moving’ writing workshop a worthwhile endeavor? As a teacher I was not working alone. Because I worked with a team, it was easier to brainstorm ideas and teach mini lessons. The original designers of the moving writing workshop made it the responsibility of the classroom teacher to present the writing lessons. In our writing workshop we had some lessons that the classroom teachers taught as well as mini lessons that were taught as part of the writing workshop. As a moving writing workshop we taught the structure of the writing workshop and six-trait lessons.

In the moving writing workshop, I had other teachers editing and advising the students on the same projects and assignments as I was. The teachers in the moving writing workshop complemented each other by presenting their areas of expertise. By having the teachers rotate and work in the various writing rooms, the students would benefit from different points of view. The students worked with multiple teachers to perfect a writing piece. The teachers, included students as teachers. When participating in a moving writing workshop the students had the potential to work with, at least, three times as many students as they do in a traditional writing workshop. The students saw a variety of writing styles and could obtain more ideas for their own current and future projects. The students learned to be critical and complimentary of others work. They also learned to edit their own work critically.

For some students the act of moving is crucial. Students that need variety thrive in a moving writing workshop. Every day the students are faced with different combinations of coworkers. The students physically moved to different rooms and the students often moved to work with others while they were in the writing rooms.

While the students had variety, the moving writing workshop also provided structure. The physical act of moving during the moving writing workshop reinforced the writing process. Each time a student completed a step in the writing process, they moved to the next step in the process. The students stated that moving helped them learn the writing process.

No matter what format is chosen, teaching writing well is imperative. Writing is an essential life skill for students. Students have to be able to express their thoughts in a

clear, concise, orderly manner. When students are given the needed writing lessons, taught the structure, and are provided the time to write, they rise to the challenge. Most students become thoughtful, creative writers. All of the students that participate in a moving writing workshop make adjustments in their writing.

### Final thoughts

Graves (2003) wrote that, “Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school” (p. 3). He wrote that statement in his 1993 version of Writing: Teachers and Children at Work, and he reiterated it twenty years later. Graves (2003) added to his 1993 statement by saying, “‘if we let them.’ For the classroom environment has changed. Teachers are expected to teach twice as much curriculum within the same number of hours under the scrutiny of any number of classrooms specialists. Time is in short supply” (p. vii).

The decision to host a writing workshop is a wonderful option for a teacher and students. The decision does not come without a cost. A writing workshop takes time away from the, already crowded, school day. During a writing workshop the students grow as writers and become more independent at editing and revising their work. The students benefit from reading and rereading their own work, as well as reading other students’ work.

The reading/writing connection is something that should not be overlooked when counting up the cost for hosting a writing workshop. Besides reading student created writing, students also read as part of their literacy program. The reading can work in conjunction with the writing workshop. A teacher can use literature to introduce

examples of writing styles and a variety of genres. Students can respond to the writing and often reading sparks a text to self or text to world connection that the student can use in their writing time.

Murray (2004) summed up the life of teaching best then he said, A life of teaching should be a life of learning about your subject and yourself. You should continually find ways that are natural for you, the classroom and conference atmospheres in which you can best function, extending the range of techniques and methods that you can apply when you see the need for them (p. 144).

This was the most enjoyable and successful writing year I have had as a teacher. Not only did the students write and enjoy writing, but I also changed as a writer. I wrote with the students and used my writing in mini-lessons and as examples. The students learned to choose interesting topics and develop them into enjoyable pieces. The really exciting thing is that the students have pieces that they want to continue to work on over the summer and publish for a broader audience.

You learn to write by writing and learn to teach by teaching. You learn from books, articles, lectures, and from experience – most of all from experiences – because all that you learn from outside your experience has to be filtered through your experience. Pay close attention to what is happening as you write and as you teach. (Murray 2004, p. 144)

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix A**

### **First-of-the-year interview questions**

1. What school did you attend last year?
2. How do you feel about writing, do you like to write?
3. Do you consider yourself a poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent writer?
4. Have you ever participated in a Writer's Workshop?
5. What do you feel is the goal of a Writer's Workshop?
6. Have you ever participated in a writing situation where you changed rooms at different stages of the writing process?
7. What type of writing projects did you complete last year?
8. How often did your class write?
9. Have you heard of or used Step Up to Writing?
10. Have you heard of or used Six-Trait Writing?

## Appendix B

### Second oral interview questions

1. So far this year, we are half way through the year, how would you say your writing is going so far?
2. What have you learned so far during the writing workshop?
3. What is your favorite writing piece so far this year?
4. Have you had a chance to write many free choice pieces?
5. Which do you like better – assigned topics or free choice writing?
6. Is your writing improving since the beginning of the year? How?
7. Is your writing improving because you are going through the writing process?
8. What do you think of the moving writing workshop?
9. Is participating in the moving writing workshop helping your writing? Explain your answer.
10. If you had a choice, would you want to keep doing writing workshop?
11. What do you think of having multiple teachers during the writing process?
12. Each day during the six-trait mini-lessons, you wrote at the end of the lesson. The following week we asked you to choose one of the topics to complete as a polished piece. Which 6-trait topic did you write about?

13. Have you noticed any changes in your writing?
14. Do you feel like you are working more with your peers or the writing teachers during the moving writing workshop?
15. What do you think of the moving writing workshop? Tell me some things that you like and dislike.
16. Are the students getting better while working in revise and response groups?
17. Do you make the changes that the students suggest for your writing piece?
18. When you hear or read a really good piece, does it make you change your writing?
19. Do you think it is easier for kids to get away with things if they are moving around? Like not do as much work?
20. Do kids go to the wrong room intentionally?
21. Do you have any suggestions for what could make the writing workshop better?
22. Do we give you enough time to finish a writing piece?
23. Does it help when you know you are going to be writing the next day at the same time?

## Appendix C

### End-of-the-year oral interview questions

1. We stopped switching rooms; what is it like now?
2. Did you notice a difference in what I did after we stopped switching – for example sharing my stories, more mini lessons,
3. How is it working conferencing with me?
4. Are you working with other students? Explain
5. Are you enjoying writing now?
6. Do you like when students share their pieces?
7. Do you like to share your writing pieces?
8. What is your best piece so far this year?
9. Sum up the writing year, what have you learned?
10. Could you explain the 6- traits to someone else? Give me examples
11. What was it like scoring other students writing pieces with a 6-traits rubric?
12. Are you writing more than you did last year?
13. Are you writing better than you did last year?
14. When you go to a new classroom next year, do you think that the teacher will think you are a poor, fair, good, very good, excellent writer?
15. Do you enjoy writing more this year?
16. What do you enjoy?
17. What do you not enjoy?